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1909



THE
HORSE THIEVES

BY

HERMANN HAGEDORN

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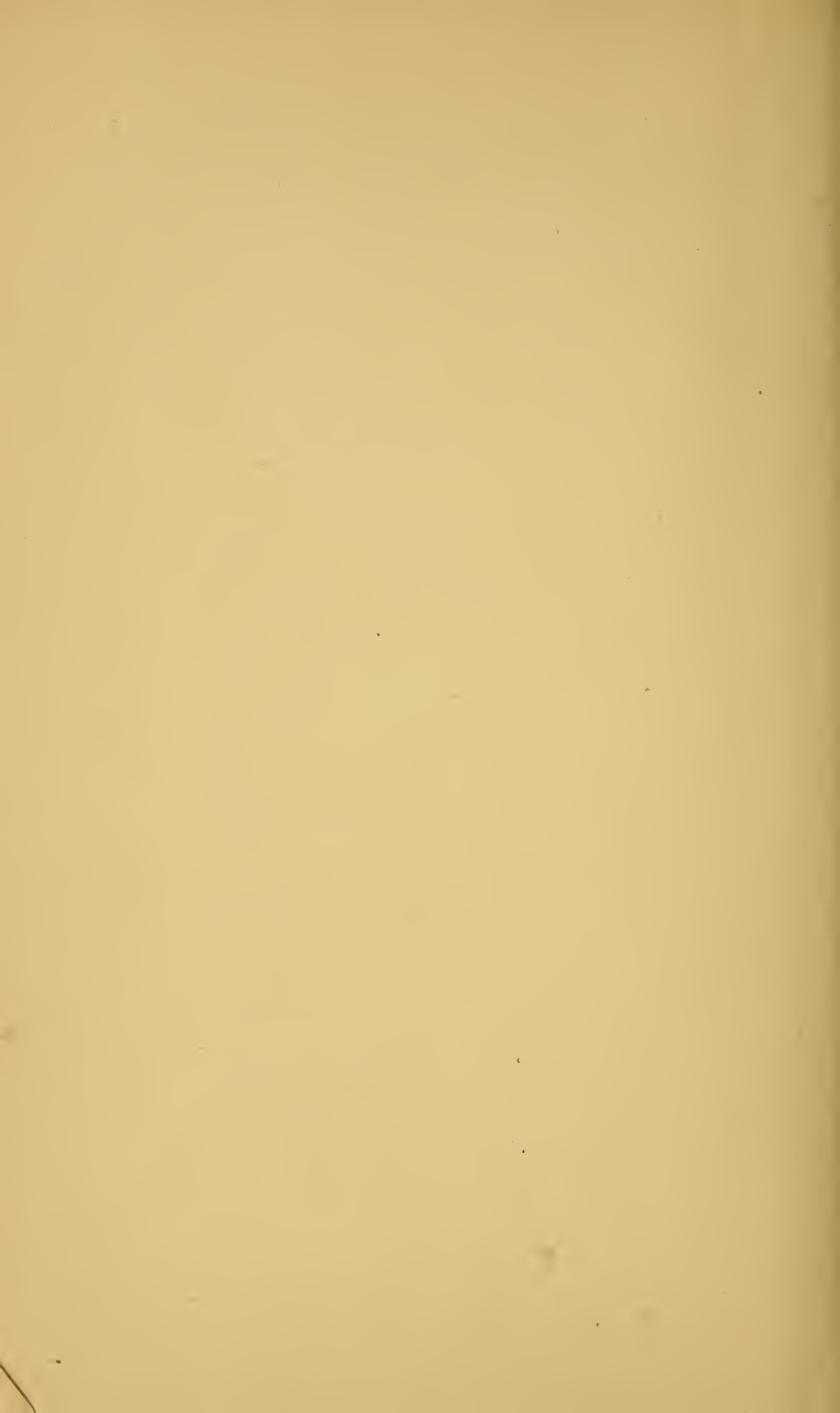
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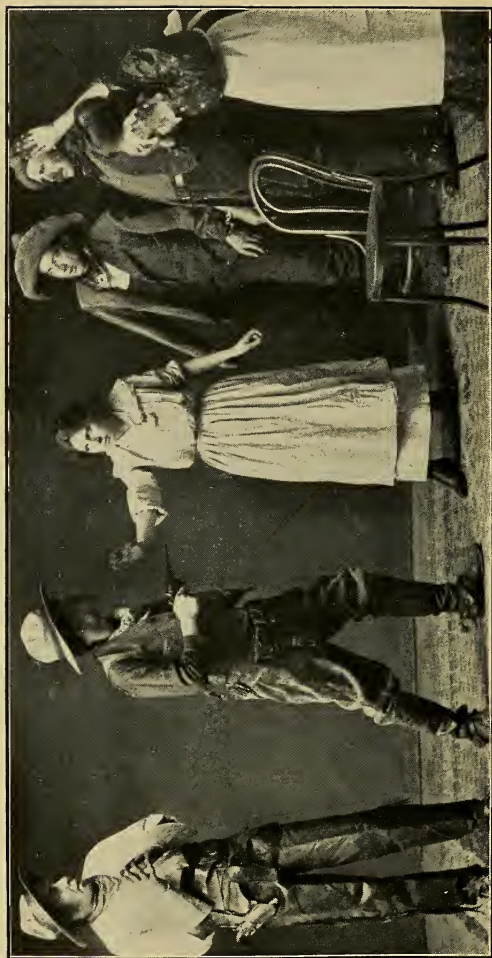


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1909





LAURA: YE WON'T SHOOT, PA?

THE
HORSE THIEVES

A Comedy in One Act

BY
HERMANN HAGEDORN

Privately Reprinted from the *Boston Transcript*
May, 1909

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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1909

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MAR 11 1910

To
SHAUN KELLY
IN REMEMBRANCE OF COLORADO DAYS

FOREWORD

"The Horse Thieves," together with "Five in the Morning," by the same author, and two other one-act plays, was produced by the Harvard Dramatic Club in Boston and Cambridge on the evenings of May 17, 18 and 20, 1909. It was published in the Boston Evening Transcript of May 22, 1909, with the following note of the literary editor:

"This play was produced by the Harvard Dramatic Club last Monday, and is offered as an example of the literary work now being done for the stage by graduates of recent years. It is founded on fact, and the horse thieves in question are now in jail. The sheriff is still telling the story of their capture, and Mrs. Bartlett is still celebrating the Sabbath on Saturday on her ranch on White River."

The right to perform "The Horse Thieves" and "Five in the Morning" may be procured from the author, care of The Players, 16 Gramercy Park, New York City. "Five in the Morning" will be published by the Houghton Mifflin Company next autumn in a volume entitled "A Troop of the Guard and Other Poems."

The author desires to thank Mr. E. F. Edgett, literary editor of the Boston Transcript, for permission to reprint "The

Horse Thieves" in book form from the original type. He furthermore extends his hearty thanks to the Harvard Dramatic Club and, in particular, to its coach, Mr. Wilfred North, for the skilful presentation of his plays.

H. H.

Cambridge, Massachusetts,
May 24, 1909.

PROGRAM
OF THE
SPRING PRODUCTION
OF THE
HARVARD DRAMATIC CLUB

Presented at Potter Hall, in Boston, on May
17, and in Brattle Hall, Cambridge,
on May 18 and 20, 1909.

"THE HORSE THIEVES"

By Hermann Hagedorn

"DEATH AND THE DICERS"

By Frederic Schenck

"FIVE IN THE MORNING"

By Hermann Hagedorn

"THE HEART OF THE IRISHMAN"

By Leonard Hatch

CAST OF "THE HORSE THIEVES"

AL BARTLETT.....*Mr. James S. Savery*
MRS. ELIZA BARTLETT..*Miss Charlotte Adams*
LAURA.....*Miss Anna Bourke*
BURT HASKELL.....*Mr. Phillip Snedeker*
OLIE MORRILL.....*Mr. James C. Nicholson*
REV. JAMES CLINCH..*Mr. Robert C. Benchley*

THE HORSE THIEVES

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

AL BARTLETT, Sheriff of Rio Blanco County,
Colorado

MRS. ELIZA BARTLETT, his wife

LAURA, their daughter

BURT HASKELL

OLIE MORRILL

REV. JAMES CLINCH

SCENE: The kitchen of the ranch house of Al Bartlett, the sheriff. The room is small and simply though neatly furnished. The three walls visible to the audience are papered with newspapers, whose scare-heads, illustrations and patent-medicine portraits furnish the only contrast and act in place of the more usual chromos. On the left, between two doors, the nearer of which leads to the bedrooms of the adjacent cabin and the farther to the toolroom and smithy, stands a large stove on which a kettle is boiling lazily. In the back wall, to right and left of the main door leading to the portico, are windows with clean muslin curtains. A woodbox stands underneath the left window, and at the one at the right is a small table on which an oil lamp is burning brightly. Above the table and a little to the left is a telephone. Four or five chairs are placed at the table or against the adjoining wall. On the right wall there is a door forward leading to the bedroom occupied by Mr. Clinch, and beyond it is a third curtained window. The time is about eight o'clock of a Saturday evening. Mrs. Bartlett, dressed in a sober gown of black, is discovered sitting with folded hands in a rocking chair at the side of the stove nearest the audience. A copy of the "Advent Herald" is in her lap. A sound of chopping is heard outside.

Mrs. Bartlett—(In a weary voice, slightly nasal and drawling). Laura!

Laura—(In a sing-song, while the chopping continues). Bu-sy!

Mrs. Bartlett—(After a moment). Laura! (The chopping ceases.)

Laura—(Resigned). Well, Ma, come on! Rustle along, though. I ain't got a heap o' time.

Mrs. Bartlett (Slowly). Waal, Laura, it's just about this Mr. Clinch. He's a nice, good —

Laura—(Still outside, resuming her chopping with new vigor). Oh, shucks, Ma!

Mrs. Bartlett—(Undismayed). He's a very nice young man. I don't agree with all his religious views, but he's very gentlemanly and nice, and I don't s'pose there's so much difference between bein' a Presbyterian and bein' a Seventh Day Adventist as how it ought to make enemies o' people. Though the Advent Herald do say that the Presbyterians is about as far as any from the truth o' God.

(The figure of Laura with an armful of wood suddenly appears in the doorway, back. She is eighteen, tall and well-built, with her brown hair in a braid down her back. She wears a blue calico dress, covered partly by a dirty brown apron.)

Laura—(With a touch of sarcasm). Comfortable, Ma? (She drops her burden into the wood-box and then turns her attention to the kettle on the stove.)

Mrs. Bartlett—(Innocently). Why, yes, I think I am.

Laura—(Disgusted). Well, all I can say,

Ma, is that it's jest the best thing in the world that the rest of the family don't indulge in no Seventh Day Advent business. There'd be a murder before the fust day come round again, even if Pa is the sheriff of Rio Blanco County, Colorado.

Mrs. Bartlett—Laura, I don't know if you ain't pretty wicked sometimes, goin' aroun' so much with your father. Don't you know the commandment of the Sabbath—to keep it holy?

Laura—Well, I don't much see the use o' keepin' one commandment if ye've got to bust two or three others to do it. What's the good o' commandments anyhow? Kill-in' people sounds pretty bad in church, but Pa shoots a man easy as talkin', and nobody sez nothin', and the more he shoots the surer he is o' gettin' elected again nex' fall.

Mrs. Bartlett—He's not so sure of it this time, he sez.

Laura—He is if he gets them horse-rustlers what's been operatin' on the "K bar Q" range. He's been after 'em fur a month good an' hard, an' the county knows it.

Mrs. Bartlett—(Resigned). I s'pose he'll be back sometime.

Laura—He will if they don't see him fust. Horse-rustlers ain't the same as other thieves. They're desprit characters an' they fight like gee! They may ha' plunked Pa now—he's been away so long.

(The sound of a horse in canter is heard, followed by a second's silence, and

then a voice—"Stop, stop, I say!"—and footsteps on the portico.)

Mrs. Bartlett—(Mildly). Well, I guess that must be Mr. Clinch. It's a pleasant evenin', Mr. Clinch. I was wonderin'—

(Clinch enters as Mrs. Bartlett is talking. He is fair, of medium height, clean-shaven, a type bred anywhere between Kansas City and Pittsburg. He wears Western clothes—corduroy trousers, flannel shirt, boots, straps, bandana, sombrero—but the effort is apparent. He is very shy, but whenever he rises out of his embarrassment, he is slightly patronizing. He is painfully neat and precise in word and action, and carefully dusts his shoes and brushes spots from his clothes whenever he is left out of the conversation a moment.)

Clinch—(Entering, is embarrassed at the presence of the two women). Good morning!—I mean, good evening.

Laura—That's right. It's evenin', Mr. Clinch. Ye're late. Supper's cleared.

Clinch—Oh—er—thank you—thank you so much for not waiting. I—that is—we—er—have dined—at the Rio Blanco—in Meeker.

Laura—Ye don't dine at the Rio Blanco. Ye feed.

Clinch—Miss Laura—er—I've got some news for you.

Laura—(Without much concern). Well, come on with it.

Clinch—(A trifle kittenish). Guess.

Laura—Pa get plunked?

Clinch—(Amazed). Eh? (Then, beamingly as he comprehends) Oh! How'd

you know it was about your father? No, he's back.

Mrs. Bartlett—Well, I do say!

Laura (Deeply interested). Alone?

Clinch—(Not understanding). He is now. But I took supper with him.

Laura—(Losing patience). I don't care about you. I mean did he get them hoss-thieves?

Clinch—Oh! Why didn't you say so? He's got them. Down in Galopp, New Mexico, nine hundred miles, thirty-two days' riding—(Stopping suddenly and considering). Or was it thirty-three? I don't know. He said—

Laura—That'll fetch the election, sure!

Clinch—I think it was thirty-two! Anyway, they're in the village jail, and—er—Mr. Bartlett thinks they will be condemned for fifteen years. (Taking out a note-book). I've got the law here. I always carry such things about with me. It helps me to be accurate.

Laura—Fifteen years! Serves 'em right. Orter get strung. But the jail won't hold 'em long if they got any sense. Pa locked me in it once just for fun, an' I crawled out through the stove-pipe hole. But I was some dirty when I got out, I guess.

Clinch—(Turning the leaves of his notebook hurriedly). Breaking jail? Oh! Extra penalty. They're safe. Mr. Bartlett has-er-threatened to shoot, if such a-er-desperate attempt should be made.

Laura—Starve 'em out if they got in

the mountains. I guess they won't budge much. Where's Pa?

Clinch—Oh-er-he's at Mr. Nimick's.

Laura—(Surprised). What for?

Clinch—He's telephoning round. You see—some one in town took our horses by mistake. We got a couple from Mr. Bryan's corral—

Laura—Some more rustlin', eh?

Clinch—Mr. Bartlett was-er-a little worried.

Laura—I guess you'll think you've struck a place that needs a parson some.

Clinch—(With a long breath of sudden desperate resolve and speaking in a low voice to Laura). I'll stay here—for a consideration.

Laura—My, but ain't you kind? Oh, I guess the ranch people'll send you round enough bacon an' beans to live, an' mountain veal now an' then, when the game wardens ain't lookin'. An' ye can ketch fish pretty well for a parson.

Clinch—(Seriously). You failed to grasp my meaning. To be precise—I mean you.

Laura—(Turning away with a shrug). Oh, then I guess Rio Blanco County, Colorado 'll have to go to hell.

Mrs. Bartlett—Laura! I wish you could do something with her, Mr. Clinch. She's got a wicked streak—from her pa, I guess.

Clinch—Now look here, Miss Laura—

Laura—Well, I guess 'tween a Presbyterian parson and a Seventh Day Adventist there ain't much show for a plain

girl what ain't got no frills. I guess it's me to work. Talk to Ma, Mr. Clinch. Convert her to your Presbyterian bizness or anythin' else that'll keep her out o' that rocker on a Saturday. It'd ease things up lots b'tween Ma and me. (She picks up a pail and starts to go out, but stops in the door. The sound of hoofs is heard.) There's someone comin'—two men—I wonder if they'll go by. (After a pause.) They're stoppin'.

Voice—(Outside). Al Bartlett the sheriff in?

Laura—Ain't come back yet. Wanter wait?

Voice—Guess we will, if yo don' mind.

Laura—Well, hitch your hosses by the fence. They'll be all right. No rustlers this-a-ways.

Voice—All right. Thanks.

Mrs. Bartlett—(Drawling). Well, now, I wonder who them are.

Clinch—I don't know, Mrs. Bartlett. I suppose we may find out if they come in.

Laura—(Dryly). P'raps we may.

(Laura has remained standing in the door waiting for the visitors, who now enter, taking off their high-crowned felt hats as they do so, and bowing awkwardly to Mrs. Bartlett and Laura. They are dressed in the customary habit of cow-boys, and wear vests over their blue shirts, but no coats. Their clothes are covered with soot. The elder, Olie Morrill, is about thirty years old, with a blond bristly beard and keen, protruding eyes, whose brightness suggests drink.

Burt Haskell, the younger man, is tall and slender, with a long, rather thin face and clear, honest eyes and mouth. He is habitually clean-shaven, but a three-days' growth is fairly visible on his lips and the tip of his chin. He is bony and awkward and is scarcely more than twenty-two. Both men appear to be in high spirits, apparently from some other cause than drink.)

Morrill—Al ain't in, eh? (Recollecting his manners.) 'Scuse us fer tumblin' in on ye in this way. We was down in Meeker an' just thought we'd like to look up our ol' frien' Al.

Laura—Pa'll be back pretty soon, I guess. Ben off a month chasin' hoss-thieves down in New Mexico.

Morrill—(Heartily). Ye don't say!

Burt—(With an effort). Oh, yes. Ye don't say.

Clinch—(Feeling the responsibilities of the honneurs). Mr. Bartlett will return shortly. Take chairs-er-gentlemen.

Mrs. Bartlett—(With mild cordiality.) Why, yes, set down.

Morrill—(Looking Clinch over dubiously). You ain't from these parts.

Mrs. Bartlett—(With a touch of pride). Mr. Clinch is a minister.

Morrill—(Satisfied). I thought ye wuz n't from these parts.

Clinch. Eh? I don't think I—er—quite see the connection. (Morrill turns away and examines the wall-paper. Clinch looks after him questioningly a moment, then pulls out his handkerchief

and carefully dusts off his shoes. Burt and Laura hold the centre of the stage.)

Laura—(To Burt). I seen you somewhere.

Burt—I dunno as I jest remember where.

Laura—Oh, I know now. Up on the range, the time I went after that cow of ourn what got away.

Morrill—(Turning round suddenly). Oh, I guess not, miss. Warn't it down at the school-house on the Fourth—that square dance—you rec'llect—you danced with—I guess it was him there (pointing to Clinch) and Burt, he was dancin'.

Laura—Shucks! Wouldn't I rec'llect where I seen him? (Embarrassed suddenly at her own warmth)—I mean—I warn't at that dance, anyhow. You (to Morrill) was ropin' a colt up by the lake where the salt is fer the cattle. Own a ranch that-a-way?

Morrill—(Glibly). Down by the South Fork, near—near Beaver Creek. Ye know that place where the river takes a big turn—

Burt—(With suspicious haste). And the road goes up to Buford. Ye want to come down that way some time. I remember the fust time Olie and I come up the river—I sez to Olie, "Now this place suits me right down;" an' Olie sez, "Burt Haskell—"

Laura—What were ye ropin' that colt up there for?

Burt—Which colt?

Morrill—(Gasping at Laura's quickness). Oh, she means the sorrel what we sold to the General. A fine man, the General. I 'minds me how when I wuz a kid—(takes a flask out of his boot). Have a swig, Burt? Sort o' hot in here, Miss. I guess I'll get a breath. You entertain the lady, Burt. (He gets up and starts for the door).

Burt—(Despairingly). Don't leave me, Olie!

Laura—(Busying herself at the stove). The one I mean was a black.

Burt—(Mopping his brow). Oh, sure, I remember now. We wuz lookin' after his brand which wuz sort o' hid by his hair growin' so long, an' you come up—

Laura—What's your brand?

Burt—Three bars in a circle—this way—

Laura—This wuz a "K bar Q."

Morrill—(At the door, breaking into convulsions of laughter). Judas, but she's got keen headlights, Burt!

Burt—(Seriously to Laura). Ye see, how three bars in a circle, sorter overgrown, can look mighty like a "K bar Q." Soon as we found out, we let him go, of course.

Laura—O' course, ye did. Ye didn't think I thought ye wuz hoss-rustlers, did ye?

Morrill—(Going out with another burst of laughter). Judas, Burt!

Burt—O' course, we didn't. But ye see, your pa bein' the sheriff—

Laura—Um.

Burt—We thought ye might be sort o' suspicious o' strangers, particularly as there's them two fellers the sheriff's been after fer a month.

Laura—Oh, them's caught. They're jugged and 'll get fifteen apiece, I guess.

Burt—(Lamely). Ye don't say! That's sort o' good work for Al, ain't it?

Clinch—(Looking up from his brushing and dusting). Got them at Galopp, New Mexico. He told me the whole story. I can give you all the details. It begins away back in November before last —

Laura—(Paying no attention to Clinch). Orter be strung up. Ef ye can't trust your hosses on the range, ye might as well shut up shop.

Clinch—There might be extenuating circumstances.

Burt—(Suspiciously). What's them?

Clinch—Something making the thieving not quite so bad.

Burt—D'ye think that, too, Miss?

Laura—Well, I dunno. Thievin' is thievin', but hoss-thievin's dirty mean, an' I dunno as anything short o' hangin' is good enough for a mean pusson.

Clinch—Well, after all, it isn't as bad as robbing a bank where the widows and orphans —

Laura—(Dryly). You ask Pa what they did to the people what tried to rob the bank.

Burt—What?

Laura—Waal, there wuz no expenses of a trial.

Morrill—(Appearing at the door). I don't see no signs of Al comin' down the road.

Mrs. Bartlett—Why, ye might telephone. I dunno but he'd want to come right soon if he knew thar wuz friends waitin' fer him.

Morrill—(With a sudden guffaw, nudging Burt). Telephone!

Burt—(Restless). I guess we don't mind waitin'.

Morrill—I dunno, I think it'd be right sociable to hev our friend Al come in an' jine us now.

Clinch—He's just down a half-mile or a trifle more at Nimick's, using the long distance telephone to ask around about some horses we lost in town. This telephone just goes to five or six ranches

Morrill—A bay mare an' a chestnut?

Clinch—Why, yes; where did you see them?

Morrill—Ye left them by the Rio Blance Restaurant, didn't ye?

Clinch—Yes, in the shed behind.

(Morrill nudges Burt surreptitiously and bursts into peals of laughter. Then, with his finger pointed at Clinch, he asks him, gasping.)

Morrill—What's his number?

Clinch—I don't see the joke exactly.

Morrill—(Holding his sides). Whow!—what's the call?

Burt—Don't, Olie!

Morrill—What do you care?

Burt—Don't, that's all I sez. I'm goin' to quit. I'm goin' back.

Morrill—(Winking). Home, eh?

Burt—Quit it! It ain't the sport I thought 'twas goin' to be, an' I'm no go.

Laura—(Dryly). Well, I don't see as there's anything keepin' ye here. If we ain't entertainin' enough for ye, well, maybe ye can do better s'mother place.

Burt—'Scuse me' miss, I guess I warn't any too perlite. 'Taint that I ain't havin' a snortin' good time, Miss, but I guess-I-jest got to move on.

Morrill—Come off, Burt! Ye'll get back there quick enough. See it out.

Burt—I won't.

Morrill—(To Clinch). What's that call?

Clinch—Eh? Oh, the telephone? Two short and a long.

Burt—Cut it out, Olie! What's the use o' her findin' out—

Laura—Me?

Morrill—He meant Al findin' out we wuz here. (Gives two short rings and a long one to the telephone). Hel-lo-

Burt—Quit it, Olie. Come on, we'll cut—

Morrill—(At the telephone). Hello! This Mr. Nimick? Sheriff there? Oh, tell him jest a couple of friends. Yeh, yeh—got 'em, did he? Good man, the sheriff. Guess he'll get the election? Yeh, yeh. Fifteen years—that's a bit high, ain't it? Well, all right. Glad to have seen ye. Hello! That you, Al? (Laughs.) Don't you know me, Al? Guess! Nope. Guess again. Ben waitin' fer ye with my partner here at your place for a half hour. Oh, come off, Al. Judas! Don't bust the machine. Yep, it's me all right, and here's

Burt, big as life and twice as natural, makin' up to yer han'some daughter. Thought we'd drop in and spend a pleasant evenin' wi' you. (Laughing.) Ye did, did ye? Through the stove-pipe hole. Darn dirty hole, too. Better have it cleaned. Ha, ha.

Laura—The stove-pipe hole!

Morrill—(At the telephone). No rush. We won't cut. So long. (Hangs up the receiver). I thought he'd come ef I ast him.

Laura—So three bars is your brand, eh? Pity ye wouldn't take a noose on a gallows.

Morrill—Mebbe we will, Miss.

Clinch—I'm afraid I don't quite understand.

Laura—You never crawled through a stove-pipe hole.

Clinch—That's in the jail, you said, didn't you?

Laura—An' them's those what orte be there.

Clinch—The hoss thieves?

Mrs. Bartlett—Mercy me!

Laura—(Going quietly to the wall and taking down a Winchester). The guns on this here ranch is loaded.

Burt—(Sullenly). We ain't goin' to cut, Miss.

Laura—Good reason, I guess.

Clinch—(Whispering to Laura). Don't make them desperate.

Laura—I guess I know how to treat a hoss thief.

Burt—We ain't come to do no harm,

Miss. Sort o' evenin' call on our friend Al—that's all. I'm mighty sorry—

Laura—Hoss-thief!

Burt—Well, I'm afraid that's what you'd call it.

Laura—They used to decorate the cottonwoods with hoss-thieves when I wuz a kid. But times is gettin' worse.

Morrill—That's a bit hard, ain't it, Miss?

Laura—I'd be harder'n that if I could.

Mrs. Bartlett—Why, Laura!

Burt—(Lamely to Morrill). I guess our little joke ain't so very funny.

Laura—(To Burt). Joke, eh? Ye lie and ye steal hosses—what else d'ye do? I s'pose ye get drunk and shoot up towns an' hold up women an' kill babies. Funny, ain't it? I wish I wuz the jury to try you when ye comes up in the fall. Fifteen years! I wouldn't give ye a day. I'd have ye swing, if I had to do it myself. Him there (indicating Morrill), he's different. I'm sorry for him. He don't know no better. God didn't start him right; but you—Burt, or whatever he calls you—you've got a milk face and eyes and a mouth that tells people you're a good sort, when ye ain't. And that's why I'd string ye, because, without sayin' a word or doin' a thing, you're a liar; and when you're tellin' the truth, you're ten times the liar than when you're lyin'—an' ye can take that to jail wi' you and be—there's pa!

(Hoofs are heard outside, and a second later Al Bartlett appears. He is short

and stocky, with a small head, low brows, deep-set keen eyes, and a sandy moustache. He wears a sack coat and a vest above his corduroy trousers and boots. A heavy silver watch chain and the sheriff's badge are prominent. As he enters, he is most excited.)

Bartlett—So here ye are, are ye? Ye thought ye'd cut, did ye?

Morrill—We wuz jest allowin' we'd give you a sort o' friendly call, that's all. Sort o' lonely down there—

Bartlett—Now see here—

Morrill—Oh, come off, Al. Ye're not goin' to take offence at a little liberty between friends.

Clinch—(Amazed). Eh?

Burt—We wuzn't meanin' no harm, Al.

Morrill—Jest a little excursion.

Burt—Ye see we did n't try to light out.

Morrill—Come right to you—even telephones you—begged you to keep us company—I don't know but you're sort o' pcor-spirited, Al, to take offence that way.

Bartlett—Now look a-here, Olie Morrill, I've treated you boys pretty white. Followed you nine hundred miles, all the way to Galopp, New Mexico, thirty-two days a-horse-back, an' never laid a iron on ye when I got ye. Ye know me, I sez, an' ye know I don't stand for no foolin'. Ef ye try to cut, I shoots, an' I never wings a man, I lays him out. Them wuz my words, an' ye never give me any trouble.



LAURA: THE GUNS ON THIS HERE RANCH IS LOADED.

Morrill—Well, I don't see as how ye've got much of a kick comin', Al.

Bartlett—I bein' so kind to you boys, it jest hurts me to see you goin' on this way. Why, jest this mornin, I wuz thinkin' of havin' ye both up here to the ranch over Sunday fer some fishin'. Ye see how I trusted ye.

Laura—Hev them up here?

Bartlett—Why, yes—friends o' mine—I don't see no harm.

Laura—(Hanging the gun on the wall again). Well, ye can hav 'em. That's all. I'm going to bed.

Burt—Say, Miss —.

Laura—Well, I guess I hain't got anything more to say to you. (She goes out, left, forward.)

Bartlett—I don't know where the girl got her manners, except from you, Mrs. Bartlett.

Mrs. Bartlett—Why, Al, I don't think you're quite reasonable.

Clinch—Miss Laura got a bit excited before you came.

Morrill—Het up, ye might say.

Bartlett—Well, cool her down, Eliza. Me an' my friends 'll just have a drop—ye need n't wait—ye need n't wait, Mrs. Bartlett.

Mrs. Bartlett—I don't know as I care to much, Mr. Bartlett. (Exit, left.)

Bartlett—No hard feelin', boys. Set down, I know ye must 'a ben a bit lonely down there, an' the jail ain't all it might be fur comfort. (The three sit down at the table. Bartlett turns to-

ward Clinch who is apparently waiting for an invitation.) Comin', Mr. Clinch? Ye might as well set down and join the publicans an' sinners.

Clinch—Don't mention it—I mean—er—of course. Thank you very much.

Bartlett—Me an' the boys is good friends, even if I have to jug 'em. (Aside to Clinch.) Liftin' horses off the range. Too bad, ain't it, particularly the younger? Oh, it hurts sometimes, I tell ye. An' those letters from their mothers! Really touchin'. But they re bad boys. Rode nine hundred miles after 'em, thirty-two days a-horse-back, I did, and got 'em in Galopp, New Mexico—eh, boys?

Burt—Guess ye did, Al.

Bartlett—An' I never put an iron on 'em. I just sez to 'em, Now, boys, ye know me. I never wings a man, I lays 'im out.

Morrill—(Pulling out a flask). Have a drink, Al?

Bartlett—(After a long drink, continuing). As I wuz sayin', Mr. Clinch, the boys knows me in this county. They knows I shoot. (Aside) Now, them two boys there. When I got 'em down in Galopp, New Mexico, nine hundred miles—

Clinch—(Seriously). Thirty-two days' riding—

Bartlett—I told ye about that, didn't I? Well, I came awfully near shootin' 'em. It'd done 'em good. But I'm kind o' softhearted, Mr. Clinch, as the Scripture sez—you know more about that than me—"longsufferin' an' forbearin'"—that's

what I am, "forbearin'." An' the mothers wrote me letters—pathetic it was. Now Burt's mother there, down in Oklahoma. She always wrote him to be good an' how she was lookin' her eyes out to see him come back. Too bad, ain't it?

Clinch—Could n't you give them another chance?

Bartlett—Well now, there's that election—an' this county needs me, it does, an' I do feel how it's my duty to get elected again.

Morrill—(With a twinkle). There ain't any more hoss-thieves you're huntin' for, Al?

Bartlett—Well, I dunno, now, I'm sort o' worried. I tell ye, it's a responsible job I've got. I work pretty hard.

Burt—(Calmly). No harder 'n we do.

Clinch—Pardon me. You're a hoss-thief, aren't you?

Morrill—Well, ain't that workin'?

Clinch—(Meekly). Er-yes-I-er hadn't exactly thought of it that way.

Bartlett—Now there is more hoss-thieves in this here county, an' ye might as well know it, an' it won't make the Jedge any lighter on ye either. Now see here. Some rustlers right down in Meeker village took our hosses while we wuz hevin' our dinner—a bay mare an' a chestnut—

(Morrill nudges Burt and looks up at Bartlett interestedly, but with a twinkle in his eye).

Morrill—Might 'a broke loose, might n't they?

Bartlett—Them hosses never broke loose on me yet.

Morrill—How d'ye come up from town?

Clinch—(Rather proudly). Bareback. Have you ever ridden bareback?

Bartlett—Got a couple of mares from Tom Bryan—

Burt—He's out o' town.

Bartlett—Well, I know Tom pretty well, an' his corral—

Morrill—Begad, A1, you stole 'em!

Bartlett—Now, look a-here, Olie—

Burt—Hoss-rustler, begosh!

Bartlett—Shut up, Burt, I'm goin' to take 'em back tomorrow.

Morrill—Yes, you are!

Bartlett—Ye did n't think I'd walk, did ye, Olie Morrill?

Morrill—Well, I did n't want to walk much myself.

Burt—I wuz wonderin' why them stirrups wuz so short.

Bartlett—Eh?

Morrill—(After a quick burst of laughter in which Burt joins, taking out his flask). Have a swig, pard.

Bartlett—(Hotly). By gee! I'll string you boys yet! (After a moment, sentimentally.) Now, I've been good to you boys. I might 'a shot ye both down in Galopp, New Mexico, but I did n't an' I brought ye back—

Clinch—(Innocently). Nine hundred miles—

Bartlett—Nine hundred miles an' never

laid an iron on ye, an' I wuz goin' to hev ye up to the ranch fer some fishin'—

Morrill—Well, here we are. What's the kick? Ain't the fishin' good?

Bartlett—An' I tell ye I'm through with ye. Gimme that bottle. (He takes a long pull out of Morrill's bottle.) Now gimme that right fist o' yours, Olie Morrill, an' your left, Burt Haskell.

Burt—Ye ain't goin' to go back on a friend, Al?

Bartlett—Come on.

Morrill—Ye ain't goin' to mind a little joke between friends?

Bartlett—I've had enough of jokes, I hev. Come on.

(They reach out their hands and in a flash are handcuffed together.)

Morrill—Well, I guess this is something like gettin' married, Burt. Is the parson goin' to say the blessin', Al? (Bartlett rises and surreptitiously takes another pull at the bottle which he quietly draws out of Morrill's pocket.)

Clinch—(Aside to Morrill and Burt). If there's anything I can do for you fellows

Bartlett—(Turning). What's that the Scripture sez, Mr. Clinch—you know that better'n me—"What man has jined together let not God put asunder." I guess this is my job, Mr. Clinch.

Clinch—(Rising). I wasn't going to interfere.

Bartlett—No offence, no offence. As the Scripture sez—"Let not the sun go settin'

on your wrath." You don't think I wuz meanin' no offence, Mr. Clinch?

Clinch—Of course not. But I guess I'll go to bed, Mr. Bartlett. See you in the morning. They'll stay here, of course?

Bartlett—(Going to tool-room door and opening it). There's your palatial headquarters, boys. Get in there quick.

Morrill—Well, good night, parson.

Burt—Good night.

Clinch—Good night. Good night, Mr. Bartlett.

Bartlett—Ye'd better ride back to Bryan's early wi' that mare, or I'll be arrestin' you.

Clinch—I'll see to that. (Exit right.)

Bartlett—(Confidentially). I didn't want to say things before the parson, but ye know, boys —(He staggers a little from the effects of the whiskey, then straightens himself, speaking with great precision.) I don't blame you boys for stealin' hosses, I've done that myself —

Morrill—(Deprecatingly). Ye're fabricatin', Al.

Bartlett—No, I ain't; no, I ain't. I don't blame ye, I don't, for stealin'. I just blame ye for—gettin' caught. Ye wuz careless, an' I believe—in doin' things up right. That's why I shoot so straight. I never wings a man, I lays 'im out an' they knows it. Now git to bed.

Morrill—Happy dreams, Al.

Bartlett—Git to bed.

Burt—Good night. Say, Al —

Bartlett—What's doin'?

Burt—Ye won't be stealin' our hosses

while we're asleep, will ye? A bay mare an' a chestnut.

Bartlett—(Hotly). Git in there.

(Burt and Morrill scamper into the tool-room, laughing; the sheriff follows slowly and unsteadily and locks the door. Then he returns to the middle of the room and stands a moment sunk in thought. Suddenly he remembers what he wanted to do and goes over to the table and blows out the lamp. The room is not entirely dark, however, for a clear moon is shining outside. Bartlett crosses the room to the door left, forward, leading to the bedrooms. He stumbles across the rocker with a muttered exclamation, then sinks into it with a great sigh of contentment. For a while he talks lazily to himself, then drops asleep).

Bartlett—Followed 'em nine hundred miles, thirty-two days a-horseback, to Galopp, New Mexico, an' brought 'em back an' never put—an—iron—on 'em. I jest sez to 'em, Boys, now ye know Al Bartlett. He never—wings a man—he lays—'em—out—

(For a moment only the sheriff's heavy breathing may be heard. Then suddenly the figure of Laura appears in the main door back. She listens an instant, then opens the screen door and enters. She hears her father's breathing and leans an instant over his chair. Assuring herself that he is asleep, she turns to the tool-room door and unlocks it.)

Laura—(Calling in a whisper). Burt! Say, Burt Haskell!

Bartlett—(Talking in his sleep). Rustlin' hosses on the range—Galopp, New Mexico—

Laura—(Raises her head to listen; then when the sheriff is silent again she calls once more). Burt Haskell!

(The door is opened slightly and Morrill's head appears. He smiles genially.)

Morrill—Good evenin', Miss.

Laura—(Impatiently). I want Burt.

Morrill—Well, I guess ye can't hev him without havin' me. We're married.

Laura—Quit your foolin'. There ain't 'nough time.

Morrill—Come here, Burt, an' show the lady. We're sort o' Siamese Twins—

Laura—What ye talkin'?

Morrill—Sort o' "Love me, love my dog."

Burt—(Showing his head behind Morrill). We're han'cuffed, Miss.

Laura—Well, come out.

Burt—All right, Miss.

(The two heads disappear an instant. The voice of Morrill is heard muttering: "Come here with that boot, young feller. This ain't no socio-logical community.")

Laura—(In a sharp whisper). Hustle up thar!

(The men appear. Laura draws Burt aside. When Morrill naturally follows, she looks at him as an intruder, then, remembering, smiles a little.)

Laura—Come here, Burt Haskell. (To Morrill). All right, since you're han'cuffed. (To Burt). I tol' ye I hated ye, an' I do. But I want ye to git.

Burt—Git?

Morrill—(Explaining). She wants ye to flew the coop, Burt.

Burt—'Tain't no use, Miss. They'd starve us out, or shoot us full o' lead.

Laura—I'll see to father.

Burt—'Scuse me, Miss, but I guess ye don't know the ol' man much.

Morrill—Gettin' us means the election, Miss.

Laura—I wuzn't talkin' to you. Ye want to remember that this is private here an' you ain't really thar.

Morrill—Well, I dunno as I can help hearin'.

Laura—You can help talkin', I guess.

Burt—Shut up, Olie!

Morrill—(Protesting). 'Tain't no easy position for a man—

Laura—Ye say ye can't git, Burt Haskell?

Burt—They'd catch us in a week. If we could, don't ye think we'd a lit out when we broke jail tonight?

Laura—(Suddenly). Where's your home?

Burt—Oklahoma.

Laura—Ranch?

Burt—Yep, Miss.

Laura—Folks livin'?

Burt—My mother keeps the place.

Laura—What d'ye steal them hosses for? Ye don't seem to mind much gettin' jailed.

Burt—(Shifting from one foot to the other in embarrassment). Well, I don't guess it was nuthin' but—I don't know—an' about not mindin' this (pointing to the handcuffs) well, I got a pretty rough

road to travel an' there don't seem much use bawlin' about it.

Laura—Was there none of them 'tenuating circumstances?

Burt—(Hunching his shoulders, restlessly). Well, things got sort o' tight down to the ranch an'—

Laura—(With an approving grunt). Go on.

Burt. There ain't no "go on."

Laura—Ever do it again?

Morrill—(Interposing). He won't get the chance, I guess, Miss.

Laura—We ain't talkin' to you. (To Burt). If ye got free, would ye?

Burt—Don't reckon I would, Miss.

Laura—Would ye go to the ranch an' work?

Burt—Well, I guess there ain't no use talkin' o' them things.

Laura—(Persisting). Would ye now?

Burt—If I wasn't goin' up for fifteen years, I don't know but I would.

Laura—Promise.

Burt—What for?

Laura—Promise.

Morrill—Judas! Burt, what's she want?

Laura—Promise.

Burt—(Simply). I will, Miss.

Morrill—(Aside to Burt). She's worse'n the parson, Burt.

Laura—(Walking up to the door of Clinch's room on the right, and knocking softly). Parson! Mr. Clinch!

Clinch—(In the room, yawning). All right. What's the matter?

Laura—Come on out. I want ye to marry me.

Clinch—(With a shout). Laura!

Morrill—Judas, Burt!

Laura—Get out, Mr. Clinch. Ye needn't get fresh jest 'cause you're t'other side the door. Comin'?

Clinch—(Opening the door a crack and peering through). I don't understand, Miss Laura.

Laura—No, you're slow. Ready?

Clinch—In a minute. (He closes the door and appears again a moment later in a long bath robe. His hair is ruffled and his eyes blinking.)

Morrill—(In a stage whisper). Look-a-thar, Burt. He's got on his parson's outfit.

Burt—(Uncomfortably). What's up, anyhow? Are ye on, Olie?

Morrill—Dead beat.

Clinch—(To Laura). You want me—let me understand you clearly—to marry—you?

Laura—Yep, an' as quick as you can do it.

Clinch—Are you sure that your deepest—er—affections are involved in the matter? This is a serious thing, Laura, and much as I desire your happiness, I want to be sure, to have—clear evidence. That is—

Laura—(Impatiently). There ain't no evidence.

Clinch—To be precise, Laura, I must know positively that with your whole soul you—er—love—me.

Laura—You?

Clinch—Why, yes, of course. It is a wonderful miracle of God that has turned your heart —

Laura—No, it ain't. (Pointing to Burt.) That's him.

Burt—Me?

Clinch—Eh? The horse-thief?

Morrill—Well, I dunno, but whoever marries Burt's got to marry me.

Clinch—(Flushing). You—you've insulted me.

Laura—(Hotly). Now you go right along, Mr. Clinch. He ain't so bad even if he is a hoss-thief.

Clinch—You can't expect me—er—to marry you off to a—jailbird.

Laura—Look-a-here, Mr. Clinch. I'm no three-year-old, an' I guess I know what I'm doin'.

Morrill—That's the way, Miss.

Clinch—(To Laura). That's just where I don't agree with you. I believe that you don't know what you are doing. I'm going to call your father.

(Laura, without answering, goes to the table and deliberately lights the lamp. Then she turns to Clinch again.)

Laura—Wake him if ye want to, an' if ye can. Everything's ready. We'll have it out.

Clinch—Well, you can have a row if you want to, but it won't do any good. He won't let this—er—prisoner go. He can't afford to.

Laura—That's just it—an' he's got to. You're a parson, Mr. Clinch. Ye want to

save souls, don't ye? It's sort o' your business.

Clinch—Not exactly. More, a calling.

Laura—Well, ye like to do it, don't ye? Same's—same's some folks take to rustlin' hosses? Now here's Burt. He's goin' to get fifteen years if he don't light out. That finishes him, don't it? He'll be ready to go on the road an' kill people by the time he comes out.

Clinch—It's a hard case, I know; but you're too good for him, and —

Laura—I ain't a great hand at savin' souls, but I'm not goin' to let Burt's fry. Jest a human interest, that's all. I'm goin' to marry him now and take him home to Oklahoma, an' the ol' man can't say nothin'. He can't send down my husband, an' he knows it.

Clinch—(Struggling for expression). D-d-darn souls, Miss Laura! I love you and I'd rather have the whole of Rio Blanco County—er—er—fry—than see you throw yourself away in pity of a horse-thief.

Laura—(In astonishment, appreciatively). That's talkin' some, for you, parson.

Clinch—Besides, your father'll shoot. He'll shoot Burt Haskell dead on the spot. He's got the right to do it. He's broken jail.

Burt—(Dryly). I guess I'll take my chances on that, if the lady thinks —

Laura—(After a pause, deliberately). Well, here's a gamble, Mr. Clinch. You marry me and Burt there, an' if Pa shoots, it's off, an' I'll marry you. Are you game?

Clinch—(Staring at Laura as if not fully understanding her meaning). What?

Burt—(To Clinch). It's just if the ole man plunks me, you're next.

Morrill—(Likewise to Clinch, persuasively, innocently). Ye see how much she's set on havin' Burt thar. She's takin' a orful risk.

Clinch—(To Laura). You'll marry me—sure?

Laura—(Contemptuously). I ain't a quitter, Mr. Clinch.

Clinch—(Slowly). Oh, dear! It's mortal sin—but I will! (As he is speaking, Bartlett in his chair becomes restless and turns round.)

Bartlett—(Talking in his sleep). I never wings 'em, I lays 'em out—

Morrill—(Nudging Burt). I reckon you're cinched.

Laura—(Dragging Clinch into the tool-room and beckoning the others to follow). Don't let pa know till it's done. (To Morrill.) You're witness. Come along.

Burt—(In a stage whisper to Morrill). I half wish I wuz back in the jail, Olie. (They go out and a moment later Clinch's voice may be heard reading the marriage service behind the closed door. Indistinctly and in a hum, the sound comes to Bartlett who makes a gesture as if to brush away a fly. Slowly his eyes open. As the fact of the room's being lighted dawns upon him, he stares in stupid astonishment at the burning lamp.)

Bartlett—(Puzzled). Al Bartlett, you put out that lamp. (He gets up and

stands a moment in the centre of the room collecting himself and listening. The sleep has somewhat relieved him from the effects of his potations. He turns to the door, on the left forward, and calls.)

Bartlett—Eliza! E-liza!

Mrs. Bartlett—(Inside). Ain't ye comin' to bed yet, Mr. Bartlett?

Bartlett—Did I put out this lamp, or didn't I?

Mrs. Bartlett—(Appearing, scantily garbed, at the door). Hadn't ye better sleep it off, Al?

Bartlett—See here, Mrs. B., I'm sober, I am, an' I put out this here lamp, an' now it's lit.

Mrs. Bartlett—(Listening). What's that noise?

Bartlett—Them boys a-talkin', I guess.

Mrs. Bartlett—Gracious, Mr. Bartlett, I hope you'll never have any hoss-thieves in this ranch again.

Bartlett—Oh, them boys is all right. (He goes to the door, but just as he is about to turn the key, the door is opened from the inside and Clinch comes out with Laura, Burt and Morrill. Bartlett jumps back in astonishment.)

Bartlett—By gee! What's this—a prayer meetin'?

Mrs. Bartlett—Why, Laura!

(There is a moment's silence. No one seems anxious to be the one to explain.)

Laura—(Slowly). Pa, you've got to let Burt go.

Bartlett—(Staring). Ye ain't gone plumb crazy, hev ye, Laura?

Laura—(Steadily). Ye've got to let him go.

Bartlett—(To Burt and Morrill, pointing to the toolroom). Git back in thar, boys! Git back, an' quick!

Burt—Mr. Bartlett—

Laura—(To Burt). You stay right thar.

Morrill—(Aside to Burt). Guess you won't have much to say even if you do get her.

Bartlett—I'm the sheriff here an' I guess if I brought you boys nine hundred miles—

Laura—Ye got to let him go.

Bartlett—Eh?

Laura—I've married him.

Mrs. Bartlett—Gracious! If you ain't a wicked girl, Laura!

Bartlett—(Speechless with rage, his hand in a flash on his hip pocket). 'Twon't be long, by gee!

Laura—(Coming quickly over to her father and laying her hand on his right arm, steadily). Pa, you've got to let us go. We're goin' to the ranch in Oklahoma and won't bother you or the hosses. I've made up my mind. Burt ain't a bad sort an' I won't let ye send him up for no fifteen years. 'Tain't right an' it's no go. Come on, Pa. Where's the key to the irons?

Bartlett—(Shaking off her hold and

slowly drawing his six-shooter). That's no game to work on Al Bartlett. No man's ever got away from me fur any reason. I've brought 'em back, dead or alive. Get away there, gal. Ye needn't get in front o' him that way.

Morrill—That ain't a friendly way o' treatin' a partner, Al.

Bartlett—(Pushing Laura aside roughly, with yet a touch of kindness in his voice). Get to bed, gal. This ain't no job for you to get mixed in.

Laura—Ye won't shoot, Pa?

Bartlett—'Tain't true, then, you've married him?

Clinch—(Biting his lip). It's true, Mr. Bartlett.

Bartlett—There's nuthin' fer it then. I'm sorry, Burt—

Laura—(Quickly). Pa!

Bartlett—'Tain't no use, gal. He's a hoss-thief an'—an'—It's no use—

Laura—Ye're makin' it worse if ye shoot.

Bartlett—I'll take the risk o' your appearin' against me.

Laura—'Tain't that. I've made an agreement with Mr. Clinch here.

Bartlett—That don't affect this business none, I guess, gal—

Laura—Well, it do.

Clinch—(Interposing). Are you going to tell him?

Laura—I sure am.

Bartlett—Come on.

Laura—He wouldn't tie the knot with

Burt here 'less I promised to marry him if ye shot.

Bartlett—An' ye promised?

Laura—I guess I did.

(The expression of the sheriff's face changes slowly; and the pistol is slipped mechanically back into the holster. Bartlett takes a step forward and lays a hand on the irons binding together Burt and Morrill, at the same time, scarce noticed by the others on the stage, drawing a key from his pocket. He sets the tiny key quickly into the lock.)

Bartlett—I can't shoot up the whole of Rio Blanco County for one gal. (He gives the key a quick turn and the handcuffs fall to the ground. Then, laying his hand on Burt's shoulder). Now git, Burt Haskell. (Turning to Clinch.) As for you, Mr. Parson Clinch, by gee, I'd rather lose the election.

(While the sheriff is talking to Clinch, Morrill turns and slips unobserved out of the door.)

Laura—(Taking Burt by the arm). Come on, Burt. It's Oklahoma for us.

Bartlett—Where's Olie Morrill?

Morrill—(Sticking his head in at the door). So long, Al.

Burt—(Rushing for the door). So long, pal!

Bartlett—(Doing likewise). Olie Morrill! Ye hoss-thief! This don't take ye in.

Morrill—(Looking suddenly in at the window, right). Hard luck, Al! Ye dassn't show up with one of us, without the other!

Laura—He's gone!

Bartlett—(With a shout). Gone with the roan!

Clinch—(Jumping as if shot). Why, that's the horse I got from Tom Bryan's corral!

Bartlett—(Picking up the handcuffs from the floor). Well, Mr. Clinch, I guess I got to arrest ye for a hoss-thief.

(As Clinch stares in stupid amazement at the sheriff, Bartlett moves forward with the handcuffs, and the curtain falls.)

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